

## So far, so functional? Examining functional and counter-functional dynamics in authoritarian regional cooperation

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## So Far, So Functional?

Examining Functional and Counter-Functional  
Dynamics in Authoritarian Regional Cooperation

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Edward Stoddard

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# SO FAR, SO FUNCTIONAL?

## EXAMINING FUNCTIONAL AND COUNTER-FUNCTIONAL DYNAMICS IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIONAL COOPERATION

**Edward Stoddard**

### Abstract

Regional cooperation, once largely the preserve of democracies, is now seen in many regions characterized by autocracy. Indeed, authoritarian leaders increasingly cooperate regionally, above all to augment the resilience of their regimes. While the output from this cooperation differs considerably from liberal-democratic regionalism, the experience of European integration nevertheless sheds light on an important underlying dynamic within this growing autocratic cooperation. Indeed, as with early and mid-stage European regional integration, authoritarian regionalism is driven by functional demands arising from the limited access nature of their regimes. However, countervailing ideational dynamics (such as the increasing salience of identity and legitimacy issues), which affect regional cooperation, are present in many cases. These counter-functional dynamics largely pre-date regionalist efforts but appear to be exacerbated by regional cooperation. This paper examines the interplay between functional demands and counter-functional dynamics in the context of 'protective regionalisms' in Eurasia, the Gulf, and West Africa. As global politics becomes more polarized, with regionalism seen as a source of strength for authoritarian states, the dynamics and underlying logics of such projects become increasingly important.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, mirroring a deepening of regionalism across the globe, authoritarian states have increasingly cooperated in regional projects. From Latin America to the Gulf, autocratic leaders have sought to define ‘protective’ regional solutions to numerous challenges that beset their regimes (Allison 2008; Libman 2007; Vanderhill 2008; Jackson 2010; Kamrava 2011). At an empirical level, authoritarian regionalist projects look, of course, very different from the trajectory of earlier regionalisms in the West. Regional integration in Europe, for example, was motivated by desires to establish peace and gradually integrate the economies of democratic European states through the pooling of sovereignty. Authoritarian regionalism, by contrast, aims to suppress democracy, protect sovereignty, and insulate key economic sectors. These differences are backed up in some parts of the conceptual literature. Some academics in the ‘New Regionalist’ school of thought, for example, have contended that conventional thinking on regionalism – grounded in rationalist, functionalist understandings of regionalism in Europe – does not effectively explain newer non-Western instances of regionalism (Schultz et al. 2001: 3; Söderbaum 2015; Söderbaum 2016). More broadly, ‘de-centered’ views of International Relations have questioned the validity of applying seemingly ‘euro-centric’ concepts and insights derived from the ‘global North/West’ to the global ‘South/non-West’ (Hobson 2012; Nayak/Selbin 2010). However, this paper suggests that, despite differences in the form and objectives of regional cooperation, some important insights into the development of authoritarian regionalism can be drawn from the experience of regionalism in Europe. Indeed, respective insights from both new and old regionalism approaches are helpful in understanding instances of regionalism outside of the West (Warleigh-Lack 2006). As was the case with early to mid-stage regionalism in Europe, regional cooperation between authoritarian states can be seen as a response to demands for functional solutions to shared problems (Börzel/Risse 2016; Börzel 2011: 12). Just as liberal states (such as those in the EU) faced common, largely transnational pressures that necessitated the need for collective regional cooperation, autocratic states also face common (albeit different) pressures that similarly compel regional cooperation.

However, while functional demand-based theories have been effective in explaining regional integration (lying at the heart of neo-functionalist and liberal intergovernmental theories of European integration), more recently counter-functional dynamics have emerged as powerful countervailing forces and alternative explanations for regional outcomes in Europe. Indeed, in the European case, most prominent are the *post*-functional dynamics (especially increased nationalism and perceived legitimacy deficits) that have emerged, in large part, in response to European integration policies (Hooghe/Marks 2009). Indeed, the European experience has shifted from one of *permissive consensus* to a *constraining dissensus*, with several other counter-functional dynamics (growing politicization, rising salience of identity, and legitimacy deficits) intricately tied to, but negatively impacting on, the integration process (Hooghe/Marks 2009: 5).

While drives towards authoritarian regional cooperation can be explained well by functional demand-based theories, counter-functional dynamics that potentially challenge authoritarian regional cooperation are also present in a number of autocratic regionalisms. While the functional objectives and counter-functional drives in authoritarian contexts are, of course, empirically different from the European experience, the underlying logic of tension is the same. These regional tension dynamics in the non-Western cases discussed in this paper largely (but not exclusively) pre-date regional cooperation efforts in autocratic regions (which are all much younger than European cooperation efforts). However, in all cases moves towards

regional cooperation can *exacerbate* or *focus* these pre-existing counter-functional tensions. Such dynamics can be seen outside of Europe despite the relative youth of some regional efforts, because these newer regionalisms have both learned from the European experience and are more ambitious in their objectives than Europe was at an early stage of integration. Furthermore, these countries are subject to many of the *same* global ‘de-nationalizing’ tendencies that Europe has faced (Kriesi 2009: 222). These issues raise the salience of identity and produce politicization and legitimacy counter-tensions for elites both in Europe and in authoritarian regions.

Taken together, this paper argues that a focus on functionalist and counter-functionalist tensions inherent to autocratic regional cooperation both offers interesting insights into explaining integration and cooperation processes amongst authoritarian states and complements new-regionalist approaches to regional cooperation and integration outside of Europe – especially amongst highly statist regimes using regionalism to bolster regime security. This paper examines these issues in the context of three regional projects in areas characterized by the presence of authoritarian states: the Gulf, Eurasia, and West Africa. To do so, the paper is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the impact of functional and counter-functional influences on regionalism, focusing specifically on the functional/post-functional tensions seen in Europe. The second section explains how the ‘protective’ authoritarian regional cooperation in the three regions can be seen as a broadly rational response (like in other instances of early regional cooperation) to functional demand. However, the functional demands of managing an authoritarian state are quite different from those facing the leaders of democratic, liberal-market economies. As such, this paper examines how authoritarian regional cooperation is driven by a desire to help elites manage a triad of pressures deriving from the ‘limited access order’ (North et al. 2007) characteristics of their political systems. The last section considers some of the countervailing counter-functional dynamics that affect autocratic regional cooperation in the three cases.

## 2. Examining Regionalism: Functional and Counter-Functional Dynamics

While some scholars from the ‘New Regionalist’ school of thought have claimed that instances of regionalism outside of the West defy explanation through conventional frameworks based on the experience of the ‘global North’ (Schutz et al. 2001; see also Kelly 2007: 201f), this paper takes a somewhat different tack. As discussed below, it suggests that some of the basic *fundamental dynamics* seen in the European regionalism experience are also present in cases of regionalism among autocrats. As Warleigh-Lack (2006: 750) has shown, the difference between new and old approaches can be exaggerated; with much to be gained from approaches that *draw on respective* insights from what are two ‘sub-divisions’ of the same research effort. Indeed, insights from new regionalism (such as a focus on identity and legitimacy) have now been incorporated into studies of EU politics and policy (Hooghe/Marks 2009; Stoddard 2015). As the rest of this paper outlines, one of the basic underlying dynamics of EU integration – the tension between functional efforts and counter-functional impacts on integration (identity, legitimacy, and politicization) – also applies, albeit differently, in cases of authoritarian regionalism outside of the West that are more often the focus of new regionalism. Overall, this paper seeks to complement new regionalist approaches by studying non-Western regional cooperation from a functionalist perspective whilst incorporating

countervailing non-functional ideational dynamics. While these tensions are pre-functional (rather than strictly post-functional) in many non-Western cases, the logic of tension is constant in all cases and this paper thus represents, in line with the arguments of Warleigh-Lack (2006), an effort to further bridge the divides between the two approaches.

At a basic conceptual level, there is nothing especially unusual about regional cooperation between authoritarian states. Just like the leaders of liberal-democratic states (especially at relatively early stages of regionalism), autocrats seek to devise functional, broadly rational regional-level solutions to collective, often transnational problems. The nature of the challenges and the responses varies, of course, but the underlying logic is similar. Functionalism<sup>1</sup> refers to a core *ontological tenet* of regional integration/cooperation theory that sees integration as an effort to provide functional solutions to collective problems. Here, the meaning is not concerned with a single theory or explanation of regional integration, but rather a conceptual underpinning of a number of theories. In the European context, both Neo-functionalism and Liberal Intergovernmentalism rest (ontologically) on functionalist logic that sees integration as a quest for effective solutions to transnational problems (Börzel/Risse 2009: 217). Neo-functionalism argues that integration derives from transnational coalitions and supranational actors pushing states to integrate in an effort to ensure benefits for societal (often economic) actors. Liberal Intergovernmentalism suggests that states pool sovereignty to realize more efficient policy solutions for domestic constituencies (Börzel/Risse 2009: 217f). Both explanations rest on a functional problem-solving logic.

Hooghe and Marks (2009: 3) note how functional explanations of regional cooperation assume a desire to address the “mismatch between the territorial scale of human problems” and the limits of “political authority.” In effect, when a state cannot solve a specific problem within its national boundaries or lacks sufficient capacity to do so – or both – this generates demand for functional (often regional) cooperation to address the problem. While Hooghe and Marks’s (2009: 3) description of functionalism above does not apply perfectly to authoritarian states (they are generally more concerned with *elite* problems rather than ‘human’ problems and with ways of keeping some parts of civil society in check rather than reflecting their interests), the logic of cooperating to ‘problem solve’ transnational challenges that cannot be tackled nationally applies perfectly well to authoritarian regional cooperation.

As has been noted by some scholars (Hooghe/Marks: 2009; Börzel/Risse: 2009), in the European case, functional theories of integration no longer suffice to explain the major events and direction of European integration. Prompted in part by the impact of referenda on political integration in Europe, Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue that scholars should adopt a *post-functionalist* approach to explain European integration. Doing so entails focusing especially on the way that the European project had become politicized, with both major decisions and the day-to-day politics of the EU refracted through national political systems and parties in which identity and mass opinion have become a much bigger factor (Kriesi 2009: 222; Hooghe/Marks 2009: 3). Consequently, mass publics (and thus perceptions of legitimacy and identity) that played a minor role in functionalist analyses feature more strongly in a post-functionalist approach. The rise of nationalist anti-European/EU sentiment (rooted in national identity) and intensely Euro-skeptic parties

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1 The term ‘functionalism’ derives originally from the work of David Mitrany who, in the 1940s, was primarily concerned with how to foster peace in post-war Europe through gradual cooperation in technical areas.



such as the *Front Nationale* in France or the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) are a reflection (of the sharp end) of this trend.

These features are intrinsically linked to processes of “de-nationalisation” (Kriesi 2009: 222). These include: 1) *political competition*, including the shifting delegation of policy responsibilities to supranational levels; 2) *economic competition*, including market liberalization, immigration, and delocalization; and, 3) *cultural competition*, including the multi-cultural effects of immigration on national polities, identities, and psyches (Kriesi 2009: 222). The net effect has been a bifurcation of winners and losers from these processes, with losers (those negatively affected economically; those without the cultural competences and qualifications needed to take advantage of these new circumstances; and those whose national identities are threatened by multiculturalism) reacting strongly against the European project.

Although the functional objectives and post-functional tensions outside of Europe differ from those in Europe because of different contexts, regime types, and national polities, similar functional/counter-functional dynamics are nonetheless observable in autocratic regional contexts. States outside of the West are also (and sometimes *more*) affected by denationalization trends. Despite the absence of democracy, it would be a mistake to assume that non-functionalist questions of identity and legitimacy play no role in authoritarian political systems. In recent years, scholars have begun to (re)examine the central role that legitimacy and legitimation play in authoritarian states (Gerschewski 2013; Wintrobe 1998; Grauvogel/von Soest 2013; Schatz 2006; Korosteleva 2012; Stoddard 2015). This is particularly significant given the global increase in revolt as a means of removing autocrats (Kendall-Taylor/ Frantz 2014). As will be seen, regional cooperation projects can be a means of dealing with the challenges of managing legitimacy issues. However, as autocratic states are also exposed to processes of regionalism, globalization, and denationalization, counter-functional pressures can afflict regional cooperation between them.

However, in most of the cases examined here, these counter-functional tensions *pre-date* regional integrative/cooperation efforts. While this is also the case in Europe to some extent (nationalism, politicized inter-European relations, and suspicion of foreigners are not unique to this époque), regional integration in Europe has itself played an important role in creating these dynamics (hence *post-functional*) and the European institutions and European integration are the target of these post-functionalist sentiments. As will be discussed below, however, regional cooperation in autocratic regions does appear in some cases to *exacerbate* existing pre-existing counter-functionalist tensions in authoritarian regions. Indeed, as regional tensions globally are heightened by processes of ‘de-nationalization’ (see above), regional cooperation can represent a political outcome that manifests, localizes, and contributes to these tensions in autocratic regions.

### 3. Managing Limited Access Orders

Unlike liberal democracies, all authoritarian states are ‘limited access orders’ (LAO) (North et al. 2007). Most of the different conceptualizations of illiberal states in the comparative authoritarianism and democratization literatures (electoral authoritarian, hybrid, strongman, neo-patrimonial, sultanistic etc.)

describe different manifestations of limited access orders. While the authoritarian states of Eurasia, the Gulf, and West Africa vary in their political systems (both between regions and, to a lesser extent, within regions)<sup>2</sup>, the vast majority of them exhibit limited access characteristics. The concept of a limited access order is thus a 'meta' regime type in that it describes a basic logic inherent to all authoritarian systems. It is therefore useful for analyzing authoritarian regionalism, as it provides a politico-economic framework of analysis that applies to all (or at least most) authoritarian regime types, whilst at the same time allowing for the specific characteristics of protective regionalism (including the impact of different regime types, as well as other regional variations) to come out in the empirical analysis.

An LAO describes a politico-economic system where access to core political positions and economic resources is restricted by the state leadership to a relatively small group of elites (North et al. 2007: 3). These restrictions provide political and economic benefits for regime leaders and their immediate supporters by generating rents that are subsequently distributed to garner the support of powerful elites and thus, in turn, ensure domestic stability (North et al. 2007: 3). Indeed, the rent-distribution and patronage opportunities such a system presents are particularly important when there are powerful elites within a state with the (individual) capacity for control over organized violence or political destabilization (North et al. 2007). In buying off powerful elites and co-opting them into the system, LAOs can provide public goods expected of all states – internal security and domestic stability. However, LAO systems do not usually present imperatives to provide other public goods such as the rule of law, human rights protections or property rights expected within open access states and open access-dominated international organizations such as the EU, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank. Indeed, such features can be dangerous for the leaders of limited access orders. Strong property rights, for example, limit the capacity to shift economic benefits between supporters when necessary. Likewise, strong protections for human and civil rights limit a leader's ability to repress challenges by political opponents.

Furthermore, limited access orders, like all state leaders (or perhaps especially so), need to both legitimize themselves and to counter de-legitimation. Historically, the most likely form of authoritarian downfall is removal by coup. However, over the last few decades the incidence of autocrats ousted by revolt (sometimes in conjunction with a coup, for example Egypt, Burkina Faso) has increased (Kendall-Taylor/Frantz 2014). As such, bolstering legitimacy – the most effective and sustainable way of avoiding uprisings – has become increasingly important for autocrats. As noted above, limited access orders deliver (when effective) internal security and domestic stability – core dimensions of legitimacy. However, as will be discussed below, regional cooperation can also be employed to provide leaders with support for their legitimation strategies and to counter threats to their broader, more diffuse legitimacy (Easton 1975).

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2 Eurasia, for example, represents a mixture of both of resource-rich semi-authoritarian neo-patrimonial post-Soviet states such as Kazakhstan and Russia (Franke et al. 2009) alongside the more strictly authoritarian and relatively resource-poor Belarus. In the Gulf, one observes a grouping of tribal, rentier-state monarchies that are all strongly authoritarian (Davidson 2012; Kamrava 2010). West Africa, by contrast, exhibits the greatest in-region plurality in the European periphery, with consolidated democracies such as Ghana alongside authoritarian states such as Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. The majority of West African states, however, lie somewhere in the middle – 'strongman-led' neo-patrimonial weakly democratic/semi-authoritarian states.

### 3.1 Cases: Limited Access Regions

This paper is an effort to map the functional ‘protective’ dynamics offered by regional cooperation efforts (and the counter-functional tensions that challenge them) outside of Europe. In this sense, it does not make specific causal claims that account for variation in these functional/counter-functional trends. Rather, the cases have been selected because, as regions with very different – authoritarian – political structures as compared to Europe, they offer scope to investigate inductively whether and how these functional and counter-functional dynamics exist in practice in non-Western authoritarian regions. The cases vary in numerous ways, showing that the functional dynamics observed occur in regions irrespective of their degree of regime type homogeneity (the Gulf: all highly autocratic, Eurasia: mixed but still high level of autocracy, and West Africa: mixed), per-capita wealth (the Gulf: high, Eurasia: medium, and West Africa: low), and levels of supranationalization (high in West Africa, medium in Eurasia, and low in the Gulf). While these factors present opportunity for testing different variables in seeking to explain variation in protective regionalism functions and tensions, doing so, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, at this stage, while relevant observations based on the above factors will be drawn out below, these three cases permit an initial examination and mapping of functional and counter-functional dynamics. In so doing, they present evidence that, in turn, can be subject to more formal theoretical development in follow-up work.

### 3.2 Under Pressure: Collective Challenges and Regional Autocratic Protection Functions in the Gulf, Eurasia, and West Africa

As described above, leaders of LAOs face a triple (political, economic, and legitimacy) challenge in the maintenance of the political systems – both internally and externally. In the cases in question here, these challenges have become more evident over the last decades, during which autocratic leaders in Eurasia, the Gulf, and West Africa have faced a series of collective transnational pressures – especially following a rise in protests and revolutions in authoritarian states since the early 2000s. The two most obvious cases are, of course, the events associated with the ‘color revolutions’ in the former Soviet Union and the Arab Spring in the Middle East, but similar trends are also present in Africa (Farge 2015). In the wake of these threats, autocrats have sought means to defend their political systems (and themselves) from pressures to reform or overthrow their regimes (Ambrosio 2007).

While autocratic leaders have domestic means of tackling the challenges discussed above, regional cooperation has provided them with a means of developing functional solutions to these problems. Firstly, regionalism can help leaders in their efforts to maintain control over the political system so as to be able to avoid challenges to their rule, either domestically or from outside sources. As the sections below demonstrate, regional bodies have assisted autocrats with (inter alia) putting down uprisings, deterring coups, and sharing intelligence on dissidents. Secondly, regional cooperation helps autocrats ensure sufficient control over economic positions of power so as to generate rents and offer benefits to other powerful individuals sufficient to stop them from seeking to subvert the status quo. As the sections below highlight, this can involve the adoption of common negotiating positions vis-à-vis international actors, protection of rent-generating industries, and attraction of economic rents. Thirdly, like all political systems, autocrats

must a) legitimize themselves in front of their citizens and, b) block or manage the impact of de-legitimation emanating from powerful Western actors. Regional cooperation assists with this function by (inter alia) ‘façade’ election monitoring, promotion of alternative (non-democracy based) forms of legitimation, and ‘image boosting.’ These broad dimensions of protective regionalism are set out below in Table 1 (including the specific political, economic, and legitimacy means of control) and discussed in three empirical sections below.

*Table 1.* Regional functional contributions to limited access order reproduction

		SPHERE OF CHALLENGE	
		Internal	External
DIMENSION OF CONTROL	Political	Regionalism helps maintain control over independent sources of political power	Regionalism helps block/reduce external support for independent sources of political power
	Economic	Regionalism helps maintain control over rent-generating sectors	Regionalism helps protect against imposition of liberalization in rent-generating sectors
	Ideational	Regionalism helps promote legitimacy of leadership	Regionalism de-legitimizes external norm promoters/defends against de-legitimation

Source: Author.

### 3.2.1 Political Control

The ‘color revolutions’ and the Arab Spring presented a range of common challenges for autocrats in both the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and the Gulf. A threat of contagion (Koesel/Bunce 2013), due to the interconnectedness of economies and societies within both the Middle East and the FSU, meant that protests in one country had a high chance of moving to nearby states. Both waves of protest showed these dynamics: interconnected societies with strong cultural and linguistic links and similar grievances towards their governments proved very fertile *milieu* for revolutionary ideas to diffuse through. Protest movements such as “Otpor!” in Serbia, the ‘Orange’ protests in Ukraine, or the ‘We are all Khaled Said’ movement in Egypt, provided demonstration effects that were picked up in other, structurally similar, contexts. Supporters were generally seeking, at a minimum, democratic reforms that would remove or limit the capacity of the state to reproduce limited access order structures and, in a number of cases, result in a complete change of political system. Such processes were not solely endogenous to the regions in question, but rather regional and national civil society actors have been aided and funded by foreign actors. The states in both Eurasia and the Gulf thus faced a series of collective challenges that were beyond the control of any one state, and required a collective response.

Indeed, in both regions, states have turned to regional cooperation as a means of augmenting authoritarian resilience. Perhaps the most conspicuous example can be seen in the GCC's (Gulf Cooperation Council) response to the Arab Spring. Following the Arab uprisings, large protests took place in a number of Gulf countries (Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain). While protestors' demands were relatively minor in most cases (not LAO threatening), in Bahrain the regime faced major sustained protests calling for a change of government. In the face of this threat, GCC states cooperated regionally to give military assistance to the Bahraini government. While comprised largely of Saudis, the GCC launched the 'peninsula shield' operation as a GCC-wide intervention to help quell the uprisings in Bahrain (Kinninmont 2011; al-Azima 2011). In addition to this military assistance, the GCC countries also facilitated transfers of funds from richer to less prosperous members Bahrain and Oman (Yom 2014: 60). To boost domestic support, Bahrain announced the creation of 20,000 jobs in its interior ministry; and Oman, similarly, announced 50,000, of which 35,000 were expected to be in the public sector (Hertog 2011a)<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the plethora of uprisings/revolutions in the region, in Eurasia support to counter revolt has not extended to direct military support. Here, support has largely taken the form of political and economic backing from Russia (and China) for beleaguered partner states. Vocal support for Uzbek president Karimov following the brutal put-down of protests and killing of civilians in the city of Andijan in 2005 provides one example (Silitski 2006: 31; Allison 2008: 189). Similarly, before the 2006 Belarusian election (coming on the tail of the Orange Revolution in next door Ukraine in 2004), Russia froze the gas price for Belarus at \$46 per thousand cubic meters (a much lower price than was paid by Ukraine<sup>4</sup> or European states) to help support Belarusian president Lukashenka's rhetoric of an 'economic miracle' (Silitski 2006: 34).

The situation in terms of sub-state threats to regimes in West Africa is somewhat different. Despite the growing role of social upheaval in the sub-continent (Farge/Felix 2014), there is little evidence of regional support for counter-civil society actions in West Africa. Here, the possibilities for regional responses to democratic protests are much more limited, given the greater number of democratic states within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the closer cooperation with Western actors such as the EU. However, the primary domestic threat to leaders in West Africa is historically not protest but military coup. Sometimes, as was the case in Burkina Faso in 2014, coups can combine with popular protests to oust authoritarian leaders (ICG 2015). ECOWAS and the African Union (AU) have developed strong protocols to respond to 'unconstitutional changes of government' (UCG) (Witt 2013: 259; Omorogbe 2011), including coups d'état. Reflecting the broader wave of democratization across the African continent (and the challenge of formal protective regionalism in West Africa) since the end of the Cold War, both of these protocols are worded so as to defend democratic state structures from these unconstitutional changes of government. However, in practice, these mechanisms appear to offer coup-*detering* benefits for both democracies and more authoritarian states alike. Indeed, these policies were originated when most states in West Africa were authoritarian. While sanctions against coup leaders have helped to bring about more democratic structures in the wake of coups, it is perhaps more accurate to see the means of *coup-proofing*

3 Similarly, the GCC transferred \$3 billion to support the new public spending plans in both Morocco and Jordan (Yom 2014).

4 In 2006 Russia raised the gas price for Ukraine from \$50 per TCM to \$230.

in West Africa as being in service of incumbent governments regardless of their democratic or autocratic quality (Omorogbe 2011: 138).

An additional regional strategy that states have fostered to deal with domestic threats in the Gulf and Eurasia is intelligence cooperation. In the wake of the Bahraini uprising, the GCC has taken further measures to increase cooperation against domestic and transnational threats, including the sharing of intelligence on dissidents. Based on a treaty originally posed in 1994 (but that was not adopted by all states), a new GCC Security Treaty was signed in November 2012 that aims, according to GCC Secretary General Abdul Latif Al-Zayani, to “empower each GCC country to take legal action, based on its own legislation, against citizens or residents or organized groups that are linked to crime, terrorism or dissension” (quoted in Khan 2012). This appears to apply to citizens or residents who interfere in the internal affairs of *another* GCC state (Toumi 2013). The treaty also calls on states to “exchange information and expertise to combat all forms of crime” which, given restrictions on freedom of speech in most GCC countries, would include most dissidents (Khan 2012). It specifically requires that states “cooperate to provide the other parties [other GCC states] — upon request — with information and personal data on citizens or residents of the requesting state, within the terms of reference of the ministries of the interior” (Toumi 2013).

Similar schemes exist in Eurasia. In particular, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s (SCO) Regional Counter Terrorism Structure (RCTS), located in Tashkent, coordinates the sharing of intelligence between the internal security services of the SCO states on the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, separatism, and extremism (Cooley 2013). The ‘three evils’ are defined very broadly and include most forms of political dissent. Indeed, what constitutes one of these threats is left to each individual SCO member’s discretion (Allison 2008: 196). The RCTS, which has minimal public oversight and does not operate with any real protections for individuals regarding data-protection, requires that each SCO state should furnish the others with ‘assistance’ when requested (UN 2009: 17). ‘Assistance’ can include a number of actions including providing information as well as detention, interrogation, and extradition of individuals (UN 2009: 17, fn.55). Similarly, details of intelligence and security service cooperation between SCO members are outlined in the 2009 Counter Terrorism Treaty (CTT). Unlike the GCC Security Treaty, details of the CTT are publically available. They include provisions (as above) on information, detention, investigation, and extradition as well as provisions allowing the security personnel of one member state to operate on the territory of another (Cooley 2013; FIDH 2012). Similarly, the CIS Minsk Convention provides a legal basis for CIS states to extradite individuals back to other CIS states (Cooley 2013).

Finally, in addition to deterring internal threats, regional cooperation in the military sphere can increase the value of states to Western backers – making them less likely to support anti-regime movements. Both the United States and United Kingdom, for example, see closer regional (military) cooperation as increasing the military utility of the GCC states to the West. GCC military action in Yemen, for example, provides a regional balance against Iran and means that the United States does not need to involve itself directly in the crisis (despite considerable US interests). Regional cooperation in this sense further increases the importance of these states to Western backers and reduces the likelihood that the United States (and United Kingdom) will shift support from them to other political actors (as happened in Libya, for example).

In West Africa, similar dynamics can be seen. Burkina Faso and Guinea (states with a recent record of authoritarianism) have taken part in regional military missions in West Africa, thereby increasing their regional and international military significance and their value to Western backers (especially France). Conflict mediation also plays an important role. Autocratic leaders have used ECOWAS as a means of boosting their regional and international importance through regional conflict mediation. While ultimately deposed, Blaise Campaoré, former long-time (autocratic) President of Burkina Faso, was valued as a 'regional leader' by France and some West African states for his role as a conflict 'mediateur' and employed as such by ECOWAS. Similarly, Wikileaks cables reveal that Gambian President Jammeh has sought to boost his international recognition by being seen as a regional security broker and negotiator, albeit relatively unsuccessfully in his case (US State Department 2001).

Overall, while all the regions discussed here show cooperation and opportunities that help autocrats maintain a hold on power, the extent and type of this political cooperation vary across the three cases. The Gulf is clearly the most advanced of the three regions in terms of political and military protection. Only in the Gulf do we see concerted military action to help ensure political survival of a member state. In Eurasia and the Gulf (again), one witnesses high levels of mutual support (both financial and political) for incumbents as well as high-level intelligence and political cooperation. In West Africa, by contrast, due to the largely democratic leaning of ECOWAS, autocratic states are only really able to use mechanisms designed to protect weak states (coup provisions, military cooperation) in general, to protect their authoritarian structures. The African Union's protocols and position (as will be discussed below) are more ambiguous here, however.

### *3.2.2 Economic Control*

In addition to acute political challenges, all of these states also face similar longer-term economic challenges. While autocratic states often seek integration into the global economy, doing so can be problematic – especially if liberalization diminishes control over major rent-generating sectors or those essential for preserving/maintaining political support. Furthermore, it is well established that economic 'linkage' with Western countries increases the likelihood of democratic transition and change (Hess 2015; Kopstein/Reilly 2003). Levitsky and Way (2005: 22) note, for example, that authoritarian states' economic linkage increases Western states' interests in democratization and makes them more likely and able to employ tools of leverage against them. As Pelagidis and Papasotiriou (2002: 522f) suggest, regional protection of industries can be a means of protecting states' (weak or growing) economic sectors from global competition, whilst still enjoying some of the benefits of international trade. This regional protection is often considered to be a means of legitimately protecting fledgling or developing industries (and jobs) from overwhelming foreign competition. However, while this is often the case, regional trade barriers can also be a means of protecting rent-generating sectors that finance autocratic patronage networks. Likewise, regional economic projects can choose to mutually ignore liberalization in certain sectors, allowing states to increase regional trade in 'non-sensitive' sectors whilst at the same time protecting sensitive ones (and the patronage structures they support). These combined needs for integration in the global economy; management/avoidance of (over) dependence on the West; and the preservation of rent-generating sectors present a common challenge



to authoritarian leaders. Regional economic cooperation provides a functional way of dealing with these competing priorities.

Firstly, operating through regional economic blocs assists states in the negotiations with major Western powers and institutions, enabling them to achieve better results and protect certain sectors more effectively. States in all three regions have used regional economic projects (Eurasian Economic Union [EEU], GCC, ECOWAS) to facilitate common negotiating positions. In Eurasia, for example, scholars have suggested that the EEU has been pushed by Russia to increase the leverage of the participant states in negotiations with Western-led economic institutions. In 2009, Russia halted its WTO accession negotiations, arguing that it would like it and its other partners in the then Customs Union (now EEU) to negotiate accession as a bloc. Russia then changed its position back to individual accession but argued that the other two states should accede on similar terms (Dreyer/Popescu 2014). In effect, Russia was increasing its negotiating clout with the WTO by suggesting that it was negotiating terms for itself, plus Kazakhstan and Belarus (plus [then] future members, for example Armenia and Kyrgyzstan).

Similarly, states in the Gulf have used the GCC as a common negotiating bloc in the world trade (Partrick 2011: 7). Indeed, Saudi Arabia in particular sees the collective weight of the GCC as offering more influence in negotiations with outside bodies such as the EU. In the (ill-fated) attempt to agree on an EU-GCC Free Trade Area, the EU members complained how the GCC states (successfully) resisted the EU attempts to reduce the GCC states' export duties on oil products and efforts to liberalize energy services and open up the GCC economies to energy investment (Rollo 2008: 5). These sectors represent the core rent-generating sectors in the rentier-systems of the Gulf States. While they may (hypothetically) have been able to hold out against Western negotiating partners independently, the collective weight of the GCC makes it easier to do so in practice.

In West Africa, regional cooperation via ECOWAS has helped West African states achieve a good result in recent Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the European Union. Ramdoo (2014: 4) has discussed how strong regional unity between ECOWAS states allowed for a beneficial deal on the EPA. As per the terms of the agreement, 75 percent of trade with the EU is liberalized, with a large number of sensitive industries – such as agriculture – being protected. While there are strong moral and public policy reasons for protecting agricultural production in West African states, agriculture is a core source of patronage and domestic support in many sub-Saharan African countries. The negotiations also guaranteed aid of €6.5 billion (for 2015-2019) – a core financial source of support (and patronage) in many sub-Saharan states.

Regional economic integration also has the potential to reduce economic dependence on Western states. This may be relative, in that trade stays the same with outside states but increases internally (trade creation), or it may be absolute in that trade shifts from outside partners to Customs Union partners (trade diversion). As economic independence is a form of leverage that can be manipulated, trade creation and diversion limit (but do not necessarily eliminate) the damage that can be done through geo-economic actions by Western states (for example sanctions for democratic backsliding or human rights abuses).

Carniero (2013: 13) suggests that the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) will increase Russian exports to other EEU members at the expense of its current main trading partner, the EU. Indeed, there is evidence



of Russian car exports, for example, increasing and Western imports decreasing in other EEU members, amounting in effect to a shift of rents to Russian automobile producers (Dreyer/Popescu 2014: 4). Referring to Kazakhstan and Belarus, Roberts et al. (2014: 13) note that “economic union is seen as a way to [...] strengthen sovereignty by creating barriers for other actors in the region, notably the EU and China, to limit the economic threat posed by ‘external’ powers”. Reducing economic partner’s linkage to third party Western states is also in Russia’s interest, as it reduces the potential for Western support for ‘color revolution’-style uprisings, to which Russia is exposed. Unlike other types of protective regionalism, these Russian efforts may not, however, boost the sovereignty of its regional partners. Indeed, they may swap some dependence on Western states for further dependence on Russia.

As noted above in the case of financial transfers in the GCC, regionalism can also be employed in numerous ways to boost revenues and assist with transfers from richer states to poorer ones. Along these lines, Belarusian motivations for joining Russian-led schemes are driven in no small part by access to Russian aid. Similarly, Ambrosio (2010) notes how Russia at various points has cancelled Belarusian debt, provided loans, and subsidized the Belarusian economy to the tune of an estimated 20 percent of GDP. Without this support, Ambrosio suggests, the Belarusian economy would be unsustainable. Minsk’s decision to join the Customs Union (now EEU) was taken in the context of financial crisis following the global crash of 2008 and a lack of available alternative funding from the EU and the IMF (which would have almost certainly come with significant strings attached) (Shmylo-Tapiloa 2012: 5).

Furthermore, Russia (and to a lesser extent Kazakhstan) has accepted a large number of economic migrants to work in Russia as part of regional cooperation rules initiated in the Commonwealth of Independent States. The remittances from these migrants play a considerable economic role in their home countries. Tajikistan, for example, is the most remittance-dependent state in the world and relied on remittances from Russia for roughly 50 percent of its GDP (Parshin 2015). These remittances play a crucial role for regime stability by boosting the economy and relieving pressures of unemployment (EurasiaNet 2012). This dynamic is not limited to Tajikistan, however; the CIS states as a whole received a total \$25 billion in remittances from Russia in 2013. Recognizing this source of influence (and seeking to encourage states such as Tajikistan to join the Eurasian Union), Russia has recently tightened restrictions on foreign workers from outside of the EEU (Parshin 2015).

Finally, ECOWAS receives significant aid from the European Union – in part because of its regional nature. Indeed, the EU specifically funds ECOWAS because of its desire to see growth in regional coordination in the West African region. The EU earmarked nearly €600 million of regional funding for the period 2008-2013 (Ramdoo 2014: vi). While many of the states in ECOWAS fall short of (their own) expected standards in terms of good governance and development, engagement with ECOWAS, given its increased focus on good governance and democracy since the early 2000s, is a means of appearing to be on a transition towards meeting global norms. While a number of ECOWAS states are in effect competitive authoritarian states, participation in good governance programs of ECOWAS allows them to present themselves as ‘states in transition’ and limit the risk of losing access to aid.

Overall, unlike the political dynamics discussed above, the economic effects of regional cooperation provide more similar benefits for autocrats in all of the discussed contexts. In all three cases, regional economic

integration has been a means of managing the levels of and terms of trade interdependence with outside powers – especially those in the West. Economic dimensions have also provided, at least in the Gulf and Eurasia, a means of redistributing funds from richer members to poorer ones – which is crucial for the political survival of smaller states. In West Africa, in addition to being a means of gaining more favorable terms of trade and engagement, regional cooperation is a crucial means of attracting foreign aid, which can be in turn (once received) a key source of patronage and rent distribution.

### *3.2.3 Legitimizing control*

Leaders of limited access orders, just like democratic states, need to bolster the legitimacy of both themselves and their political structures (Gerschewski 2013; Grauvogel/von Soest, 2013). Given that the respective regimes in the three regions rest on similar legitimacy bases (Islam/tribal culture/monarchy in the Gulf, economic progress and stability in the FSU, ‘big man’ leaderships in West Africa), and given the interconnections between societies within these regions, a challenge to the legitimacy of one state represents, in effect, a common challenge. Furthermore, in addition to legitimacy challenges from below, authoritarian leaders regularly face challenges from international actors (such as Western states, Western companies, and Western NGOs). While they are selective in the efforts to promote change (Ambrosio 2014; Börzel 2015), these three sets of actors regularly push autocrats to liberalize their economic and political systems and delegitimize leaders in the process. A crucial challenge for authoritarian leaders is thus to find a way to block and counter these delegitimizing moves by powerful external actors. This section covers a number of ways in which regional cooperation helps authoritarian states to realize these objectives.

Firstly, regionalism in West Africa and Eurasia has helped leaders by lending credibility to elections – their main formal form of legitimation. Many of the states in West Africa and Eurasia are ‘competitive authoritarian’ or ‘hybrid’ orders: states where political power is ostensibly achieved through winning elections, but where elections are rigged or controlled in such a way as to ensure that limited access restrictions remain in place. Under such circumstances, elections serve a fundamental role of legitimating autocrat’s tenure on power and thus are a core dimension of authoritarian rule (D’Anieri 2014: 80). The most notable function here is election monitoring by regional organizations that sometimes give a positive verdict on elections that are marred by irregularities.

In Eurasia, two organizations – the CIS and the SCO – stand out in particular (D’Anieri 2014: 90; Silitski 2010: 348). Following the ‘Color revolutions,’ where flawed elections were trigger points for uprisings, the CIS has sent its own observers to post-Soviet elections to counter Western monitors who were accused of legitimizing regime change (Silitski 2010: 348; Fawn 2006: 1144; Cooley 2012: 110). These CIS observations have uniformly endorsed the (re-) election of incumbents (Silitski 2010: 348). In the vast majority of cases, the CIS results have diverged considerably from OSCE reporting on the same elections. The results of SCO missions have been similar to those of the CIS, with endorsements extolling the validity of elections that contradict Western observations (Boland 2011: 16; Cooley 2012: 114). As Boland (2011: 16) notes, these missions are “intended as an additional legitimizing factor for the organization and for member states ruling authorities.” Similarly, both ECOWAS and the African Union have been criticized for passing positive

verdicts on flawed elections (although the record of the AU – which almost always gives a positive verdict – is worse in this regard).

Beyond providing legitimization around elections, regionalism among authoritarian states has also helped leaders to challenge broader Western perceptions of legitimacy and defend themselves against *de-legitimation*. Indeed, the CIS and SCO are employed to contest Western perceptions of legitimacy and, particularly, to open-up normative space for alternative models of political order. A fundamental tenet of both the CIS and SCO is respect for political diversity. Both organizations seek to promote pluralism in international affairs and thereby provide space for autocratic states to solidify their rule and reject the export of other models.<sup>5</sup> This is encapsulated in the notion of the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ – a set of norms that gives “legitimacy to the organization and its member states, and defines common goals” (Jackson 2010: 112). These include norms of “respect for diversified civilizations and mutual development” (Jackson 2010: 112f). These institutions allow participating regimes to demonstrate support for each other’s regimes, whilst at the same time legitimating the ideas of non-interference and pluralism (Jackson 2010: 113).

In Africa, the AU sometimes plays such a role. A recent example has been the AU’s efforts to reduce the influence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Africa. The majority of ICC prosecutions have been against African political elites, including a number of state leaders such as President Bashir of Sudan and President Kenyatta of Kenya (du Plessis et al. 2013). The disproportionate number of African prosecutions has led to a perception of bias in ICC cases and has been strongly resisted by the AU. Some have suggested that the rejection of ICC in Africa (which is not universally rejected by African governments) is driven by autocratic leaders who are concerned that they themselves may one day ‘need to’ take action that would contravene the court’s principles (The Economist 2011). However, while ICC denunciation may be self-serving in some cases, the wider rejection of the ICC also demonstrates a number of the values of the AU that hold much weight across Africa; in particular, pan-African solidarity; the reinforcement of an ‘African’ way of doing things and rejection of universality of values (and jurisdictions); the re-enforcement of state sovereignty; and the rejection of perceived neo-colonialism.

Beyond rejection of Western legitimacy, regional cooperation allows for the promotion of alternative (non-Western) regional identities and perceptions of legitimacy.<sup>6</sup> In most cases, these regional identities and legitimacies underpin domestic power structures and the contestation of Western norms. Just as regional organizations create normative space and challenge identification with Western norms, this space can be filled by regional and domestic identities and corresponding forms of legitimation.

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5 The SCO’s “Declaration on the fifth anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation” asserts that: “Diversity of civilization and model of development must be respected and upheld. Differences in cultural traditions, political and social systems, values and model of development formed in the course of history should not be taken as pretexts to interfere in other countries’ internal affairs. Models of social development should not be ‘exported.’” (SCO 2006).

6 There is not enough space here for a full discussion of the links between identity and legitimacy. It suffices to say that collective identity and legitimacy are closely entwined, with identity helping to shape values and norms to which legitimate action of governments must accord.

The primary regional identity advanced in Eurasia is embodied in the concept of Eurasianism. It essentially relates to the notion that there are common geographic, historical, and ethnic (and in some cases quasi-spiritual) bonds between peoples in the Eurasian space – and that, crucially, distinguishes them from Western civilizations and the values, identities, and norms that they entail. However, while meta-physical and abstract, this view offers a practical regime-serving function as different leaders can ascribe different (national) meanings onto the concept of Eurasianism and use it in different ways for identity-building and legitimation. Popular Russian Eurasianism, for example, incorporates a number of concepts from Russian nationalism. While Putin himself has emphasized the common bonds that link Eurasian peoples, Russian Eurasianism entails notions of Russia's great power and leadership status in Eurasia, emphasizes Eurasian (and hence Russian) distinctiveness from the West, and mirrors a form of concentric circles model of the Eurasian space with (ethnic) Russians and Moscow at its core<sup>7</sup> (Laruelle 2004; Popescu 2014).<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, the GCC has always emphasized a number of legitimating factors – most prominently Gulf traditions (Islam, tribalism, and monarchy) that are common to all GCC states. Indeed, tradition is a powerful source of legitimation for the Gulf state leaders (Schlumberger 2010: 242; Albrecht/ Schlumberger 2004: 377). Tribes represent a mechanism for political expression and representation in the absence of political parties and open debate, and this tribal system helps to legitimate rulers who sit at the apex of this structure (Wright 2011: 83). The presentation of traditional symbols of identity in the Gulf has increasing traction with populations, driven in part by the presence of large numbers of immigrant workers (who now outnumber citizens in some cases).<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Islam and monarchy both play a very potent legitimizing role in the Gulf. All of the states in the region base their legal codes on Sharia law, and perceptions of religious virtue are important parts of state leaders' appeal (Wright 2011: 76). Furthermore, the GCC considers itself as a stalwart of Sunni Islam. Finally, as Colombo (2012: 10) notes, the GCC is fundamentally a "club of monarchies" and the tradition and symbolism of monarchy are an important part of on-going regime legitimation. Indeed, throughout the Arab Spring, the Gulf monarchies worked hard to present the uprisings as an issue reflecting problems and deficiencies with Arab republics as political systems and as something that did not affect monarchies (Colombo 2012: 10).

Finally, many of the authoritarian regimes across Eurasia, the Gulf, and West Africa are led by 'strongmen' who have sought to cultivate 'cults of personality' and images of themselves as 'fathers of the nation' (Isaacs 2010: 436; Osaghae 2010: 408f; Söderbaum 2010: 5). Autocratic rule in many states rests on various forms of charismatic legitimacy, where the legitimacy of the state as a whole is linked to identification with the leader. This is particularly the case with regard to developing states where state institutions may lack

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7 Indeed, when Russia is pursuing policies animated by and justified in terms of Eurasianism (of the Russian kind), they can be used to appeal to both Russian nationalist sentiment (a substantial section of Russian society) and those (more common amongst the intelligentsia) who do ascribe to transnational Eurasian identities and values.

8 Pryce (2013: 29) has suggested the Russian government's adoption of Eurasianism represents an elite effort to find "a new framework of identity for the broader Russian society."

9 Gulf societies (like some in the West) have felt a sense of delocalization and unease at these high immigration numbers and consequently demonstrations of traditional values are welcomed by sizeable numbers within the Gulf populations (Al-Khouri 2010: 83).

legitimacy and where popular leaders are seen as part of what holds the state together (Osaghae 2010: 408).<sup>10</sup> Regionalism in all cases assists leaders in preserving and bolstering these images.

For example, almost all regional bodies in the three regions hold grand summits that provide opportunities for posturing. SCO summits, for example, are impressive affairs, accompanied by much publicity and held by different members in succession, with the leader of the host state receiving support and congratulations from his regional colleagues and having the opportunity to make a speech extolling the virtues of the SCO. For the smaller states, hosting a summit also involves bilateral meetings – usually well publicized – with the leaders of Russia and China. Meetings of the GCC are likewise similarly grand and well publicized, with leaders meeting both bilaterally and multilaterally, offering each other support and boosting perceptions of themselves as leaders and statesmen. Large GCC summits and communiqués offer the GCC leaders an opportunity to reinforce each other’s standing and to present themselves as carriers of a specific region-wide Gulf identity (Debre 2015: 14). This, in turn, helps bestow prestige on each respective leader whose domestic legitimacy is founded on the same traditional Islamic tribal and monarchical foundations.

Informal gatherings of regional leaders can have a similar effect as well. For example, despite Gambian President Yammeh’s poor democracy and human rights record, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Gambian independence in 2015 were attended by a range of regional foreign dignitaries including President Mahama of Ghana (also current chairman of ECOWAS), President Vaz of Guinea Bissau, President Ould Abdel Aziz of Mauritania, Vice President Sambo of Nigeria, and Senegalese Vice President Dionne (Amin 2015). While the event was not a formal meeting in ECOWAS or the AU, this form of visible public support from regional leaders lends legitimacy to Yammeh and boosts his public image (also interesting given that ECOWAS as a whole has boycotted Gambian elections in the past).

Overall then, regional cooperation assists leaders in maintaining their legitimacy in a number of ways – crucially both internally and externally. In terms of the formal means of ascribing legitimacy, regional cooperation plays an important role in bolstering election processes in hybrid states (in West Africa and Eurasia). While elections may not be free or fair, they are seen by populations as important events and mark the (internal) legitimacy of the government. Regional observers and monitors can bestow legitimacy on elections that would otherwise be more challenged by Western observers, thereby helping to legitimize unfair processes. Beyond this formal dimension, however, in all regions, regional cooperation helps defend regimes against external Western de-legitimation, and crucially, create *space* for alternative internal legitimization narratives – including those based on regional or transnational ties such as tribal and Islamic culture in the Gulf, Pan-African sentiment, and Eurasianism in the FSU. Finally, in countries where leaders rely on cults of personality and charismatic leadership, regionalism offers many opportunities for internal image boosting – including for meetings with prestigious leaders (from Russia or China, for example) and for mutual personal support, as seen in West Africa.

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10 As Isaacs has documented, in the case of Kazakhstan, for example, President Nazarbayev has created an image of himself as indispensable ‘father of the nation’ whose wise leadership is responsible for many of the successes Kazakhstan has made since the early 1990s (Isaacs 2010).

#### 4. Counter-Functional Trends in Eurasia, the Gulf, and West Africa

As the sections above have shown, authoritarian states have employed regional cooperation to deal with the functional problems they face in preserving their regimes. However, as has been the case in European integration, these three regions all face counter-functional tensions that challenge integration processes. In particular, identity questions and perceptions of sovereignty, independence, and legitimacy challenge further efforts to integrate.

In all cases described in this paper, the existing counter-functional dynamics largely pre-date regional integration. Indeed, they explain in part some of the hesitance to move towards supranational political structures of the types seen in Europe. However, regional cooperation does appear in some cases to concentrate and provide a locus for these tensions to manifest – sometimes in new forms. Furthermore, regional cooperation in Eurasia and West Africa has – although not to the same extent – reached in a shorter period of time a relatively high level of supranationalism in certain sectors. In response, certain policies associated with regionalism have become politicized, even if some of the underlying causes pre-date the specific regional projects. Indeed, just like European societies, as described above, societies in authoritarian states have also been exposed (sometimes even more exposed) to similar de-stabilizing trends associated with globalization, economic competition, migration and cultural challenges. Regional cooperation sits atop, but also suffers from the effects of these trends – even when the antecedents for these trends pre-date regional cooperation.

In Eurasia, for example, one of the primary counter-functional challenges facing cooperation among authoritarian leaders lies in populations' perceptions of their status in relation to Russia, and the Russian population's perception of its status in relation to the former Soviet states. This is, of course, an age-old question linked to Russian and Soviet imperial histories but also, in the reverse direction, to historic invasions from Central Asia into Russia. Russian foreign policy identity assumes a position of leadership for Russia in the region born both of the history of Russia as the major regional power since the birth of the Russian Empire and the pre-eminent position of the Russian SSR in the Soviet Union (Popescu 2014: 19). This perception is boosted by Russian nationalist sentiments that see a dominant role for Russia in its near abroad – especially in those states that are home to Russian minorities (Sakwa 2011: 958). However, at the same time, the newly independent states of the Former Soviet Union (such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan etc.) vehemently defend their independence. This is more than a rational desire to have one's sovereignty respected. For these states, independence from Russia is part of their growing national identity – indeed, it is

what allows such an identity to be present and grow in the first place. Unlike in Europe, where anti-regionalist sentiment is linked to desires to restore national sovereignty and pride, in Central Asia, for example, it is linked to the perceived impediments to building that sovereignty in the first place.

While Russia's relations with its periphery is an old question, recent example of these tensions can be seen in Russia's relations with both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, with implications for newly established Eurasian Union. One case concerns comments Vladimir Putin made at a Youth Forum Q&A surrounding Kazakh statehood in 2014 (Dolgov 2014). Putin suggested that Kazakh statehood only stretched back to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. These comments were perceived as both a political and



cultural slight (Casey 2014) and drew much consternation in Kazakhstan prompting Kazakh celebrations of Kazakh statehood that, according to President Nazarbayev, dates back to the 1400s (Lillis 2015). In terms of regionalism effects, these issues played out in resistance to the idea of a political union with the Eurasian Economic Union and insistence on the part of Kazakhstan in particular to retain the 'Economic' in the title of the organization (Vatanka 2014). Nazarbayev publically reminded Putin (and the Kazakh population) that Kazakhstan had the right to leave the EEU and would do so if its independence was threatened (Dolgov 2014). Similarly, the historical record of Russia in the region has become increasingly politicized, both in Russia where glorification of Russian history (especially the Russian role in the Second World War) is increasingly common post-Ukraine crisis, and in other Eurasian states where perceived Russian atrocities are seen as important events in national consciousness. In Kyrgyzstan, the government is preparing to celebrate the centenary of a violent putdown of Kyrgyz nomads by Russian-supported Cossacks in 1916 (Rickleton 2015). Nationalist opposition MPs have linked the 1916 events to the Eurasian Economic Union, which Kyrgyzstan is set to join. Indeed, those MPs opposed to joining the Union have suggested that it is a modern form of Russian imperialism. Likewise, others questioning Kyrgyz sovereignty in its relations with Russia have received quick rebuke from the government very keen to assert its sense of statehood (Rickleton 2015). Overall, while leaderships rely on close relations with Russia for functional regime protection purposes, the perception of losing one's independence has costs in terms of domestic legitimacy. These tensions hinder regional cooperation efforts, but it is efforts to cooperate, and perceptions that regional cooperation is linked to efforts at domination by Russia, that bring them to the fore.

In West Africa, the most clear counter-functional trend (at least from the autocratic point of view) is the rising tide of democratic identity amongst populations in the region. Although some aspects of formal and informal regional cooperation facilitate authoritarian leaders (as described above), the importance of democracy is growing in the region. Indeed, ECOWAS officials have suggested that popular protests make it easier for them to pursue democratic outcomes in the wake of constitutional crises. This issue derives, at heart, from the fact that while ECOWAS originated from and developed its working (especially high-level) practices during a period in which the organization was dominated by autocrats, but as a result of the global wave of democracy in the 1990/2000s and the growing democratic resolution of crises, the level of democracy in the region has grown. The rising desire for democracy amongst populations within West Africa and the empowerment of ECOWAS to help them realize it, presents one of the biggest challenges to autocrats and makes them sometimes suspicious of ECOWAS.

Furthermore, however, identity (both national and cultural-linguistic) plays a role in hindering cooperation in the region. First, with (albeit imperfect) parallels to Russia in Eurasia, Nigeria's perceptions of its role as the regional leader also presents challenges to other states. Bach (2007: 303) describes how Nigeria has long perceived itself as having a 'manifest destiny' and presumed leadership in West African regional cooperation (and beyond). In practice, however, Nigerian attempts at regional leadership – expressed primarily through its engagement in and support for ECOWAS – have been resisted (especially by French-speaking countries) (Bach 2007: 305). This latter factor reflects a broader division – the separation of ECOWAS states between Francophone and Anglophone (and Lusophone) states. While there have been efforts to overcome this divide, Bamfo (2013: 21) describes it as the biggest "threat to the solidarity of ECOWAS members." These tensions are compounded by a number of factors, including the different administrative cultures, competencies, legal systems, and linguistic factors, and have had practical implications in terms

of cooperation. The ECOWAS Community was, for example, divided over intervention in Liberia along linguistic lines, with Francophone states largely opposing the intervention (Bamfo 2013: 21). Furthermore, intercultural tensions within ECOWAS are further complicated by (and of course have their roots in) tensions between the major power patrons of the organization – France and the United Kingdom. While ECOWAS is by far the most effective regional body in West Africa, France places considerable weight on relations with the Francophone countries in the region and the West African Economic and Monetary Union, and has historically been distrustful of ECOWAS and Nigeria's dominant position within the organization. Historically, France and French-speaking West African states have supported rebel movements with Anglophone states (such as French support for rebels in the Biafra war or Bukinabé support for Charles Taylor in Liberia). This has been reciprocated in the other direction with, for example, Anglophone Gambia's support for Casamance rebels in Francophone Senegal (Tamba 2013). These tensions largely pre-date regional cooperation, but regional cooperation efforts can provide a locus for these tensions, especially when regional cooperation is seen as a means for one side to pursue their interests.

The Gulf suffers from some similar tensions. In particular, both the Saudi and Qatari regimes hold self-perceptions as potential regional leaders and have differing considerations of the wider security threats in the region (despite a common threat perception of 'Arab Spring' style uprisings). Qatar has long sponsored a number of Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood that Saudi Arabia finds threatening; and the Qatari regime has used the TV station *al Jazeera* to further its influence in the region (al-Rasheed 2014). Qatar and Saudi Arabia have also found themselves on different sides of conflict on post-Arab Spring North Africa – most notably in Egypt, where Qatar supported the ousted Mohammed Morsi and the Saudi regime supported the new government under al-Sisi. In addition, both states have different perceptions towards Iran, with Qatar less hawkish towards the Islamic Republic than Saudi Arabia (al-Rasheed 2014).

Furthermore, integration has in some cases now become perceived as a threat to independence by a number of the Gulf regimes. In particular, Saudi efforts to promote a shift from a Gulf Cooperation Council to a *Gulf Union* have been strongly resisted (Riedel 2013). Saudi Arabia has a number of times/repeatedly sought to get other Gulf states to combine in a single union or perhaps even a single state (within which it would be predominant). Riedel (2013) suggests that Riyadh has proposed this policy as a means to foster greater unity in the face of numerous threats the region is confronted with (from their perspective). However, Oman (amongst others), which has a distinct cultural heritage and a long history of independence and which practices a different form of Islam, has fiercely resisted the project, fearing diminished independence and cultural imposition (Riedel 2013). Nevertheless, it may be the case that (relative to the other regional blocs discussed here) identity itself plays a more positive role in terms of integration in the Gulf than elsewhere. The region is more culturally homogenous than either West Africa or Eurasia and it is easier in this case to identify specific regional identity traits, while West-African regional identity and Eurasian identity are far more contested and amorphous concepts.

However, while politicization, rising counter-functional identity issues, and legitimacy tensions may hinder regionalism, it is possible also to envisage the opposite being true. Indeed, as a final point in this section, it should be noted that politicization and legitimacy deficits do not necessarily always detract from regional integration. In the European case, democratic deficits have driven efforts to make the EU more democratic (including developments in the European Parliament and transparency requirements). Likewise, the



financial crisis, while having a disintegrating effect in some ways, has also spurred integration efforts (banking union, moves towards political union). Furthermore, in the European case, regional cooperation has traditionally been a core means of restraining major powers (most notably Germany). While politicization and the negative effects of rising salience of identity and fears of regional powers have hindered regional cooperation as described above, it does not necessarily mean that these challenges will render regional cooperation permanently defunct. Indeed, one response to the challenge that the politicization of regional cooperation poses is, as predicted by neo-functionalists, more spillover and more integration to address these problems. The counter-functional tensions described above may lead to integrative stasis, but could also over time prompt more integration. As one example, long-running tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia (discussed above) prompted the signing of the GCC 'Riyadh Supplementary Agreement' in late 2014 (Hassan 2015). This document committed leaders to bolstering the unity of "their states, their interests and future of their peoples" and called on leaders to move towards joint actions and a "bold and cohesive Gulf entity" (SUSRIS 2014). While such commitments mean little in terms of *formal* integration in the Gulf context, as noted above, many of the functional objectives and benefits of regional integration in the Gulf derive from informal behavior. Indeed, the agreement drew a direct image-boosting effect, being welcomed publicly by the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference who suggested that the agreement was to the benefit of the whole Islamic 'Ummah' (the world-wide community of Muslims) (Arab Today 2014). Security issues underpinned this rapprochement (Hassan 2015) and since the new agreement, collaboration in counter-terrorism and relations towards Egypt and Yemen appear to have become more cohesive. Although it lies beyond the scope of this paper, the extent to which regional tensions have (ultimately) *bolstered* regional cooperation in autocratic regions remains an interesting avenue for future research.

## 5. Conclusions

The counter-functional dynamics of regional integration outside of the West have received less attention than in the Western context. As this paper has sought to show, regional processes in three regions characterized by high levels of authoritarianism exhibit functional/counter-functional dynamics, as has been the case in Europe. Of course, the nature of these functional and counter-functional trends is different. Functional output in authoritarian regions is guided by the need to preserve limited access order structures. As discussed in the paper, limited access orders presuppose restrictions on political and economic positions of power to ensure stability and require legitimation and protection from de-legitimation. Regional bodies in all three regions help LAOs by providing functions that assist autocratic leaders. Each region is different and the provision of these functions varies, as discussed above. Nevertheless, regionalism in all cases offers benefits for autocrats that help them to manage some of the major political, economic, and legitimacy challenges they face.

However, at the same time, all three regions show countervailing counter-functional dynamics. In many cases, these relate to the level of state-building and the extent to which perceptions of national independence and sovereignty are tied up with national identity and the legitimacy of rulers. Kyrgyzstan, for example, relies on its relations with Russia. At the same time, however, the nature of this unequal relationship and

the historical baggage it entails can cause troubles for state leaders. In West Africa, national tensions and broader cultural-linguistic tensions have hindered cooperation between state leaders (including between autocrats). While in Europe counter-functional tensions are largely *post*-functional (created by European integration with integration often as the target), in the regions discussed above counter-functional tensions are largely *pre*-functional – tensions that existed before regional cooperation to some extent, but that are exacerbated and given practical form by regionalism processes.

Autocratic leaders must respond and adjust to globalization and transnational processes – especially those that threaten their regimes. At the same time, however, these processes and their reactions can generate further tensions between states. In particular, imbalances in power between states and the threats this poses to national identity and cultural independence militates against regionalist processes. The intersections of functional efforts to deal with these problems and the simultaneous counter-functional challenges that hinder closer cooperation have received little academic attention in relation to autocratic and protective regionalism. Nevertheless, as is the case in Europe, it is the very intersection of these dynamics that helps explain regional integration/cooperation outcomes between authoritarian states.

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